



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# THE MODERN PULPIT

---

ARTHUR S. HOYT, D.D.

Professor of Homiletics and Sociology in Auburn Theological Seminary,  
Auburn, New York

---

*No teacher of homiletics in the country is doing more for the preacher than Professor Hoyt. His volumes, "The Work of Preaching," "The Preacher," "Public Worship for Non-Liturgical Churches," and "Vital Elements of Preaching," are all so serviceable that they should be mentioned here.*

## I

There is no definite type or standard of preaching in America. In the past there have been—certain great types that became classic. As in literature so in the pulpit, creative minds expressing national or age-forces laid their spell upon their generation. The critics reduced the spell to laws and others sought power through imitation. Edwards made the mold of thought and speech for the pulpit during the last half of the eighteenth century. Bushnell, Beecher, Brooks, each had something of this influence in the last half of the nineteenth century. No man today so rules our thought or tells us how to preach. Will God raise up prophets as of yore?

There is more law and conformity in Great Britain. One language and one tradition largely make it possible. Great churchmen like Robertson, Stanley, and Liddon; great free-church preachers like Guthrie, Maclaren, Spurgeon, Parker, still have a molding influence upon the pulpit. The hearing of sermons is still thought a privilege. They have not been surfeited with a perfect "gorge of speech." As many as five hundred ministers from the provinces would

sometimes listen to Joseph Parker's Thursday-noon sermon. And the reading of sermons is a habit. It is astonishing to the American mind to see the number of volumes of sermons issued yearly by the English press. The English and Scotch pulpit can be analyzed and characterized and estimated.

It is not so with the American pulpit. The land is too vast for a common opinion. There are provincialisms in the pulpit as in daily speech. The natural diversity of a great country is increased by multiplicity of sects. Some have come from special emphasis of doctrine, others are the outgrowth of person or method. Each has made some characteristic contribution to the American pulpit. The Baptists have stood for the "liberty of prophesying" and the authority of personal experience. The Congregationalists have made the highest culture contribute to preaching. The Methodists have been the fiery evangelists to the common man. The Episcopalians have made the sermon a part of worship and an office of the church. The Presbyterians have stood for a teaching ministry. And the Unitarians have broadened the conception of religion and the themes of the pulpit.

There is the greatest diversity in the conception of the sermon and its place in the life of the church. And to this must be added the differences of race. The various peoples bring their old-world tastes and habits. The race differences limit religious contagion and lessen the power of the pulpit.

The variety in the American pulpit has meant freedom and originality. It has given an unconventional, personal quality to preaching. Spirit has been more than form. There have been a freshness and a genuineness that have given life and power to the best preaching.

But the personal element has often been too marked in our pulpit. Our preachers are far too free in their personal experience. They forget that the personality is never so pervasive as when the person is lost in the message. A partial view, a narrow horizon, makes an eccentric message and eccentric Christians.

Freedom has sometimes worked lawlessness, regardless of truth or the laws of speech. Our preachers sometimes speak too easily and freely about the greatest truths, about what they know so little. Where is the modesty and tolerance of honest scholarship? One of the critical addresses of the Briggs controversy was spoken by a man who could not write the Hebrew alphabet. Such preachers do not deal sincerely with truth. And there is a carelessness and imperfection of speech that comes from a shallow nature and a shallow hold of truth. It lacks reverence for the message and respect for the spiritual nature of man. It is impious not to try to give the glorious gospel the best

garment possible and it is an insult to the moral nature of men to think that they can understand only the speech of the gutter. Lack of finish is lack of fidelity. An impure speech is the mark of an impure life.

## II

I doubt very much whether our ministry has a high enough sense of the importance of preaching. We are too likely to be affected by the popular opinion of sermons. The sermon does not rank in popular estimate with other forms of writing and speaking. The literary editor of a metropolitan journal said of Bishop Potter's book *Churchmen Whom I Have Known*, including such great names as Dean Stanley, Canon Liddon, and Bishop Phillips Brooks, that "It was a pity so much thought should be spent upon men whose work was entirely aside from the main currents of life." Men feel that deeds, not words, are needed to cure the world's ills. Those engaged in practical service are likely to despise preaching as mere words; and the church itself is too indifferent to it. The part of the church that depends upon the authority of organization and the saving virtue of sacraments need not exalt the pulpit to the first place. But those who believe that Christianity can be taught, that the Christian life is an intelligent and rational course of conduct, depending upon the constant interpretation of the religious life of men and the truths of the Bible, must exalt the sermon. The pulpit is the chief means of teaching religion. The history of the church proves this and the psychology of teaching. The pulpit teaches truth for life in an atmosphere

the most favorable for its purpose—in the spirit of worship and the sensitiveness of the Christian fellowship.

The low estimate of the pulpit is partly the fruit of a low use of it. The ministry should make preaching a great work—as was said of Lyman Beecher “the great action of his life”—and never give the impression that talk is easy and cheap. By the substance and form of our preaching we should make men realize that we take our work seriously, that we have something to say that has cost labor, that we give our very life with our speech.

### III

The pulpit should speak in the largest terms of the gospel. It is tempted to be partial and provincial. Present and personal needs are always the most pressing. Local views are likely to fill the whole vision. But the nearer cannot be understood save in the light of the far horizon. And the hesitation of the modern pulpit, under the insistence of some present call, to present the largest interests of the Kingdom of God accounts for its feeble influence upon the personal and social ideals of the age.

And here is the subtle influence of a congregation upon a prophet's spirit. Shall the minister preach what people expect, “a very pleasant voice”? Shall he measure up to the test of full pews and swelling receipts? “And so prudence hammers at the door, and sympathy turns devil's advocate.”

The spirit of many churches is still sectarian and provincial. It is in the popular commercial phrase “Trade at home: don't take money out of the town.” They will heap gifts with scan-

dalous prodigality upon a sensational evangelism that booms the town and swells the roll of the churches and stills the social unrest, while the tragic cries of the world—a stricken Belgium, a bleeding Armenia—are heard by only a few. They give listless or irritated attention to a man who applies the word of Christ to child labor or the relation of nations. A narrow gospel has small inspiration for an enlarged manhood. Only the great visions of the Kingdom can sustain the prophetic spirit. Only such a pulpit can transform life and give the church its spiritual authority over the peoples.

### IV

There is a *dogmatic preaching* that fails of the largest result. It is strong on defense of the faith, but weak on the “love that thinketh no evil.” It is quick to denounce a growing conception of God as the decay of faith, and deals with the Bible in an uncritical spirit that removes it from the realm of literature. It stands deaf and dumb before many of the pressing questions of religion. It demands submission, on pain of anathema, to what it calls divine authority—really only the authority of a particular school of thought.

The dogmatic pulpit is indifferent or hostile to the organic view of society. Social service is of the world—“and the ministry [actually spoken in a national religious gathering] has nothing to do with saving the world: its only work is to help men to pass through the world on the way to glory.” Such a pulpit is keen for what immediately affects the individual, its sole emphasis personal salvation; it is careless of the environ-

ment which more indirectly but as vitally touches the life of the community.

Recognizing the zeal of the dogmatic preacher and his effectiveness in reaching the individual, always the first work of the pulpit, his defects are not hard to find. Such preaching threatens to undo or submerge the results of a generation of biblical study. It tries to justify that hoary lie that "the end justifies the means"; and so glorifies an evangelistic egoism that gives false or partial views of Christianity, sets up an artificial standard of character, and makes impossible demands of the church.

The masses are untaught; Christian nurture in the church is neglected; the cleavage grows between an emotional type of religion and the intellectual; the increasing number of college men and women are critical of the church; and a multitude of people, deeply religious if judged by the test of unselfish service, are left outside of organized Christianity.

The pulpit needs reverence and humility, openness to the light, genuine faith in the power of the gospel and the Spirit in the hearts of men. It is folly to steady the ark of God; it is ours to receive and follow the truth.

## V

The opposite tendency to the dogmatic is also seen in the modern pulpit. It might be called the purely *ethical*. If suggestive thought and fine idealism and personal charm are considered, it could be said that some of the best preachers of America are of this school. A professor of a great university said to the writer that he had heard the university sermons for a year—and few distinctive Christian notes. That re-

minds one of Blackstone's remark of the eighteenth-century pulpit of London: "No more gospel than the essays of Cicero." This may not be fair but it has some truth in it.

Old forms of Christian truth have passed away and many preachers have not thought through far enough to clothe the truth in new forms. In doctrinal uncertainty, like sincere men, they turn to what they do know and declare the ethical truths and practical duties of life. Religion is real and the source of all true life, but a certain vagueness and elusiveness lies over its facts like the veil of mist over an autumn landscape. Some of them have lost the evangelistic purpose, the passion for souls, the urgency of appeal.

The gospel is a culture, best for men to have; life is not complete without religion. But without it, is there irretrievable loss? Such preaching lacks the faithful dealing with conscience, and the mastery of a positive message. We do not understand men, if we ignore sin. No man has more sharply called the attention of modern thought to the real catastrophe of sin than Mr. John Morley. He calls it "that horrid burden and impediment on the soul, . . . which, by whatever name we call it, is a very real catastrophe in the moral nature of man."

And we do not understand Christianity if we ignore its redemption. The crucible of war is bringing out neglected truths. It tells us that we need "a gospel that will deal with the evil bias and spiritual impotence of the human heart, and by its assurance of a forgiveness in Christ and a proclamation of the power of the Holy Spirit meet the need

of a sinful man. . . . It is not too much to hope that the soft and easy messages of the past years will cease to be heard and the message of redemption for sinful man become the evangel of the years to come." So writes a Scotch preacher from the realities uncovered by God's hot plowshares.

The gospel means the growth and

enrichment and perfection of the soul and a redeemed society of men. But its initial is the relation of the individual life to God through Jesus Christ. The gospel is the most effective ethic, but it must be a redemption or it can have no expulsive and transforming power in human life. This is the great message for the modern pulpit.

---

## JESUS AND SOCRATES

---

REV. WILLIAM F. BOSTICK

Freeport, Illinois

---

*Probably no two characters have been more compared than Jesus and Socrates. Such comparison enables us to understand both the better, provided only it is not too rhetorical and is very careful as to the facts. Mr. Bostick's article covers this familiar field in such a way as to revive interest in both of the two great lives compared.*

It is the purpose of this discussion to point out some of the similarities and dissimilarities of these two great moral teachers.

There are some striking parallelisms in the lives of these two characters. Both came from a country small geographically, yet great in achievement. Socrates is connected with Athens, the most cultured of early cities, where the first public library was established. Jesus is connected with Jerusalem, the most religious of early cities. The father of Socrates was a sculptor, the father of Jesus was a carpenter. Both came from the common people, both had unaristocratic parentage. Both were teachers of the common people, both loved to go where the masses met.

Neither wrote. So far as we know the only thing Jesus wrote was what he scribbled on the ground when Pharisees brought into his presence a fallen woman for condemnation. Socrates, when asked one day why he did not put his words into writing, said, "I would rather write on the hearts of living men than on dead sheep's skins." Both made conversation the business of life. Jesus preached occasionally, but more often imparted his teachings to his disciples in conversation. The Gospel of John records mostly private interviews of Jesus with individuals. Socrates once said, "I have a benevolent habit of pouring out myself to everybody and I would even pay for a listener if I could not get one in any other way."